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City Council to vote Monday on restoring funds to GLBT youth programs

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Seattle City Councilmembers will vote on Monday, Nov. 22, to restore funding to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender programs and organizations and to approve \$125,000 in funding to be set aside for LGBT youth services.

Lobbying by LGBT community members and public testimony have been credited for the recent council actions.

Mayor Greg Nickels had proposed to cut community-based advocacy programs by nearly \$317,885 in September, when he submitted his proposed 2005-2006 biennial budget to the council. The cut could have cost the American Friends Service Committee's GLBTQ Youth Program the \$53,697 it receives from the Human Services Department. Likewise, a \$14,802 grant from the city to the Seattle LGBT Community Center could also have been in peril.

AFSC's GLBTQ Youth Program had already been heavily impacted by previous funding cuts during the past 19 months. Further cuts could have jeopardized the future of the program, which includes a speaker's bureau and intensive internships. On Thursday, Oct. 14, program director Joyful Freeman joined a handful of youth to address the council during a public hearing on the topic.

"I want you to know that GLBT youth rely heavily on human services to help them find safe housing and shelter, job training, appropriate and affordable healthcare, and other basic human needs. These are crucial services for GLBT youth in a world where, unfortunately, they often don't have strong family or community support," said Freeman.

The Seattle LGBT Community Center had used its grant dollars to operate a resource and referral network. The program connects Center volunteers, over the phone or in-person, with community members who may need assistance locating services.

Meanwhile, Lambert House, a LGBT youth drop-in center in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood, was seeking to restore the \$75,000 it lost last year. It was the first time the agency had been denied funding by the city since the house's inception in 1991. The funds, which made up 20 percent of the organization's annual budget, allowed Lambert House to deliver basic needs services, provide case management and foster leadership development.

"We want to thank the Seattle City Council for listening to all the people and organizations that testified in person, sent emails and phoned on behalf of the GLBT youth community," said Jeff Bachman, program manager at Lambert House. "In addition to the restoration of funds for youth organizations, the City Council approved \$125,000

for GLBT youth programs. We are happy with the success of the efforts of so many youth, volunteers and community supporters for this cause.”

Councilmembers Peter Steinbrueck and Tom Rasmussen told the SGN this week that they understand Lambert House’s plight and sought to ensure that services for LGBT homeless and at-risk youth were adequately funded.

“We decided that it was time to acknowledge squarely and openly, if you will, that this segment of the population that was at risk and in need of supportive services,” said Steinbrueck. “Good research, supported by testimony, case histories and service providers; all of that helped to make a strong argument.”

Rasmussen agreed. “We know that Gay and Lesbian youth tend to get kicked out of their homes, be abused, harassed more than their counterparts who are not Gay or Lesbian – that is the Gay and Lesbian youth that are brave enough and bold enough to be out,” he said. “They are ostracized by their families and their peers in schools. As a result, those kids need a lot of support and assistance. Many of the programs for young people aren’t particularly helpful or appropriate to Gay, Lesbian or Transgender youth.”

According to one study published in the American Journal of Public Health (May, 2002), Gay youth in Seattle are at greater risk of substance abuse, being kicked out or suffering physical or sexual abuse when compared to heterosexual peers. The study also suggested that the rate of LGBT homeless adolescents ranges from 11 to 35 percent. Yet, no funds have been specifically allocated to address issues faced by LGBT homeless and at-risk youth until now.

Under the proposed 2005 budget package, which is set to be finalized on Monday, \$125,000 dollars would be available through a competitive process to agencies that provide services to LGBT homeless youth or those in danger of becoming homeless. The funds would be administered by the Human Services Division.

“We spend hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars, for homeless youth — almost \$3.4 million. Very little of that is specifically designed to support programs that are helpful to Gay, Lesbian and Transgender youth,” said Rasmussen. “So this is an important addition to the budget, but the reality that it is a drop in the bucket compared to the \$3.4 million that we spend on homeless youth services. But, I’m really pleased that the council is adding this in.”

Steinbrueck and Rasmussen praised Lambert House, the American Friends Service Committee and the Seattle Commission for Sexual Minorities for their help in gathering council support. However, they especially sought to thank the young people who testified before the council last month.

“I think it was helpful to hear, face-to-face, what some of these young people had to say. I think it impressed people,” said Steinbrueck. “That was very compelling. I would have to say that if they had not been there, I think it is very doubtful that we would have succeeded in pulling this off. The testimony was critical to this.”

“It makes a big difference when the people who receive the service and actually know what is needed come to the council meeting,” added Rasmussen. “Those young people

can be thanked, not only because this helped them but, probably, the people who come after them.”

Steinbrueck says he is hopeful that the Human Services Department will make the funds for LGBT homeless and at-risk youth a permanent part its budget. “During difficult budget years, human services are always under attack for cuts. That is typical,” he said. “I hope this will become part of the ongoing, regular funding support that the city provides for youth and homeless. We have opened the door for continued funding, not something the Mayor hacks every year or tries to eliminate.”